

Recovery through Employment: The Jomar Giner Story

By Kathleen Piché, Public Affairs Director



Born in the Philippines and raised in San Francisco, Jomar Giner was a busy third-year student at Bard College in New York when she grew increasingly paranoid. She was attending classes, doing work study as a full-time intern for Human Rights Watch and working in a movie theater. She had also lost sixty-pounds in the prior three months. While taking a routine quiz in one of her evening classes, she responded in one-word answers:

1. They
2. Are
3. Watching
4. Me

Her teacher realized something was wrong and alerted Student Emergency Services, which landed Jomar in a psychiatric unit. Jomar believed that she was in a television show; everyone around the world was watching her, much like the main character in the film “The Truman Show.” She was manic and wrote all over the walls in the hospital.

After two months, Jomar stabilized and returned to her family in San Francisco. In outpatient treatment there, she was diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder—a mix of mental health conditions, including schizophrenic and mood disorder features— that may run a unique course in each affected person. Later that year, she stopped her medications and became depressed. She isolated herself in her room, leaving only when nobody else was at home to get food and use the bathroom.

In 2007, her family relocated to a small town in Utah, and again, she began experiencing audio and visual hallucinations. She saw Britney Spears in the mirror and thought she was part of a reality show. She knocked down the television and her family called the police for help. Thinking the officer that arrived was not real, she spit on him. She was arrested and spent the next two weeks in jail. She did not receive treatment in jail and remained psychotic.

"It was like having headphones on that constantly played music with static," she said. "I saw holographic images."



When she returned home, her paranoia caused her to wreck her sister's room and, again, the police were called. She spent the next four months in jail, waiting for a room in Utah State Hospital Forensics Unit to become available. She plea-bargained down her sentences of property destruction and assaulting an officer (spitting), got eighteen months of probation and was court-ordered to take medications.

An outpatient therapist in Utah suggested vocational rehabilitation and Jomar returned to school. She attended Weber State University in Ogden and graduated Summa Cum Laude with High Honors and a 4.0 GPA, an accomplishment that she's "pretty proud of."

Needing a change, Jomar took a road trip with a friend through California. She was riding a bus when a random woman told her, "You have to let go of your fears. You know who you are (and what you're capable of)." This statement had a profound effect on Jomar and she moved to Los Angeles in 2013.

In LA, she lived in the Arts District and got treatment at LACDMH's Downtown Mental Health Center, then later got treatment at the Asian Pacific Counseling & Treatment Center (APCTC). In 2015, Jomar finally "got regular" on meds and therapy, and was referred to vocational rehabilitation. She got a short term gig with the Boys and Girls Club of Venice, and a 3 hour-per-week job with the Youth Policy Institute, then finally,

last December got a full-time job as an Employment Facilitator for the General Relief Opportunities for Work (GROW) Program at Weingart Center, which she's had for six months now.

"The last three months have been great," Jomar said, smiling. Her symptoms are minimal and she knows that when she feels stressed, taking a PRN helps. "I have not been hospitalized since 2008, but I know that I will always be in recovery." She was also diagnosed with sleep apnea.



On April 6, 2016, Jomar shared her personal story of hope at LACDMH's Moving Recovery Forward Through Employment Conference. She was recognized by LACDMH Acting Director, Robin Kay, Ph.D., who presented Jomar with a certificate and a journal, honoring her accomplishments and efforts in assisting others.

Having the awareness of her stressors and symptoms helps her recovery. Jomar says that working has helped her the most. "Employment should be part of recovery," she said.

When asked what advice she'd give to others she said, "Learn to face your fears. Don't be discouraged. Find treatment that works."